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ABSTRACT

One of a series of pamphlets about effects of the American Revolution in Georgia, this document reviews Georgia's economy during the years 1775-1789. It can be used as supplementary reading or a two-week unit for junior or senior high school students. A brief teacher's guide is included. The main part of the pamphlet relates the political and economic changes created during the Revolution in Georgia. Before the Revolution, Georgia had a flourishing economy with rice and indigo exports. Mercantile interests in London dominated Georgia's commerce and an extensive plantation economy developed in the coastal low country. Lumbering also increased. However, beginning with the Stamp Act in 1765, Georgia's export business was curtailed and ultimately prohibited except with loyal British colonies. Problems were compounded by devaluation of continental currency, scarcity of imported foodstuffs and farm equipment, and the exodus of Tories and slaves who had managed and worked on the plantations. However, within a decade of the panic of 1786, Georgia began to acquire financial stability, increased trade, and attracted new settlers. The teacher's guide presents learning and skill objectives, activities, and discussion questions based on the text. (Author/AV)

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The Impact of the Revolution upon Georgia's Economy 1775-1789

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Editors' Note:

One of the early concerns of the Georgia Commission for the National Bicentennial Celebration was the lack of material on Revolutionary Georgia available for use in the state's public schools during the bicentennial years. As a result, one of the first projects of the Commission was the preparation of a series of pamphlets on the American Revolution in Georgia aimed specifically at public school use. With the cooperation of the Georgia Department of Education, this project has become a reality. Thirteen pamphlets are scheduled to be published between 1974 and 1978.

Our purpose in publishing these pamphlets is to present a clear, concise picture of Georgia's history during these important days. We hope that our efforts will encourage students' interest and add to their knowledge of Georgia's activities during the American Revolution.

Kenneth Coleman
Milton Ready

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Lexington, Massachusetts was a long, long way from the towns, plantations and farms of frontier Georgia in April of 1775. Few Georgians had ever heard of the little New England town until they read in the *Georgia Gazette* that fighting had broken out there between the local militia and British redcoats. Moreover, few would have imagined that this small skirmish would lead to the most revolutionary war in history and that over 600 Georgians would be killed and several thousand more displaced as an aftermath to Lexington.

Although the events leading up to Lexington caused a political stir in Georgia, they had little effect upon the daily life of most of the colony's inhabitants. Indeed, there seemed little to complain about economically. In the spring of 1775, Georgia was enjoying the benefits of an economic boom that had no end in sight. In fact, a few Georgians were uneasy over the prospect of too much prosperity. James Habersham, a wealthy Savannah merchant, anxiously wrote a friend in London that "we have a greater Number of Vessells in the Savannah Harbour than has ever been known here at any one Time, loading for England and the West Indies. The Demand for our Produce . . . is so very great, that I am afraid, we have scarcely sufficient on Hand to give the Vessells now here (and there are more daily arriving) the necessary Dispatch." Still, these were good problems.

Georgia's Prewar Economy

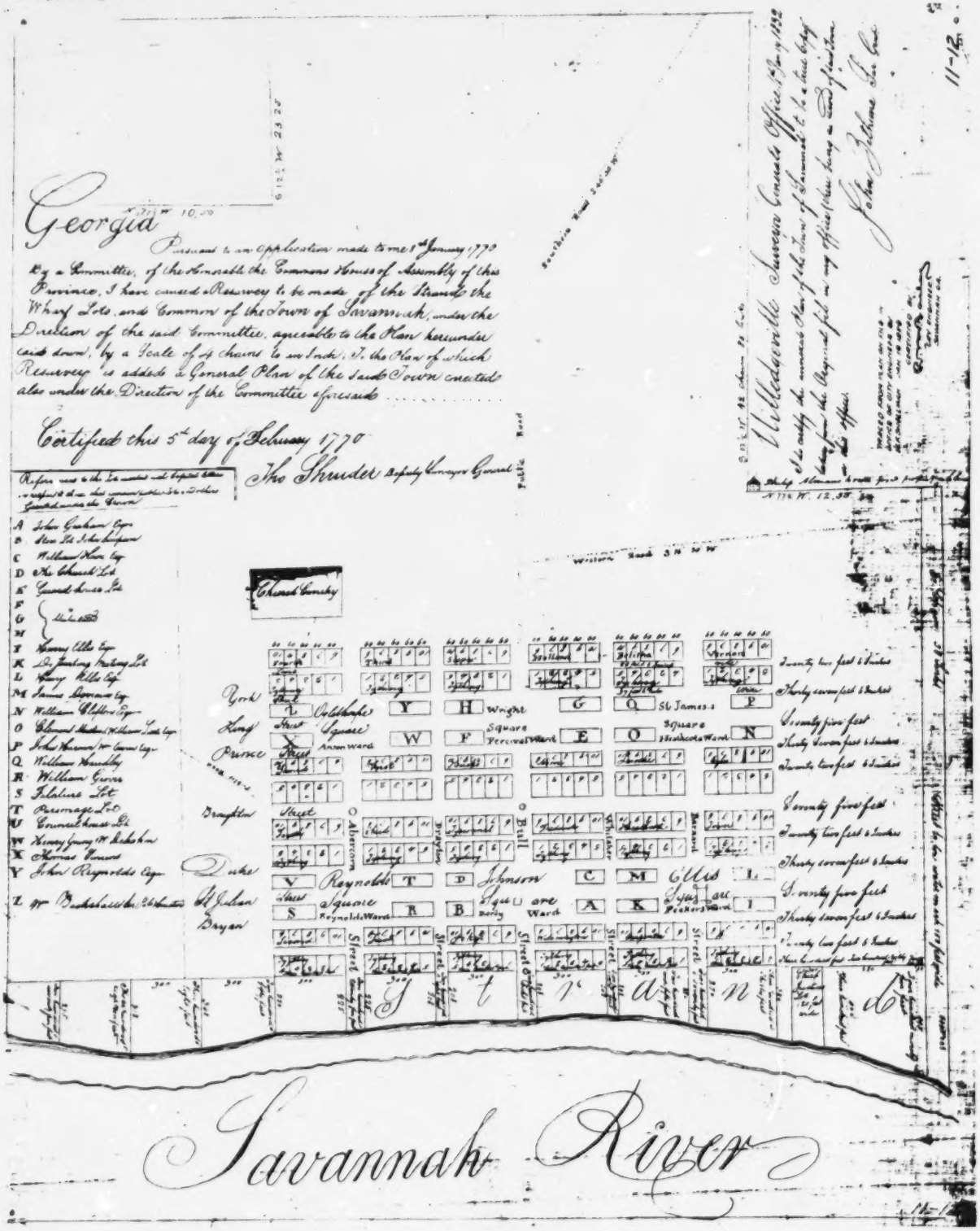
James Habersham reflected Georgia's relative prosperity in 1772. James Wright, governor since 1760, equally was satisfied with the colony's economic boom. "The year I came here," he reported in 1768, "they did not make 4,000 barrels of Rice and last year we made 17,000 barrels, and from Loading only 42 Sail of Vessels we have loaded 185 in a year, and are making a very rapid progress towards being an opulent and considerable Province." By 1775 Georgia exported nearly 25,000 barrels of rice a year.

Nowhere was the prosperity more evident than in Savannah. In 1772 over 160 ships totaling 12,124 tons and employing 1,700 sailors cleared the customs house. Additionally, planters and merchants in the Savannah area owned wholly or in part "five ships, one scow, seven Brigantines, thirteen sloops and schooners and ten coasting vessels." From the Savannah River southward to the St. Marys, more than 50 trading boats and rafts, mostly owned by Savannah merchants, plied the inland rivers and waterways bringing all sorts of cargoes to the towns, docks and piers. Wharf lots on the Savannah River, once to be had for the asking, were a prized property by 1770. They ran from the site of the Trustees' Garden west of Bull Street to the old Yamacraw Indian village, 33 lots in all. The most sought after lots – those forming the heart of Savannah's old commerce row – were the 10 west of Bull Street belonging to Edward Telfair, Joseph Clay, Samuel Stiles, John Morel, Edward Hopton, Samuel Douglas, Thomas Lloyd, John Gordon, Thomas Netherclift and the Gibbons' family.

Lining the riverfront east and west of Bull Street were port facilities suitable to handle over 20 vessels at once. One merchant, Joseph Wood, owned a warehouse located west of Bull Street that was four stories tall, "fifty feet long, and forty-five feet wide . . . divided into ten rooms, sufficient to hold two thousand barrels of rice, a machine to hoist goods from the wharf into either story, or into the upper one, where they are rolled through the town." Across Broad Street Wood maintained "a store for dry goods and a counting room . . . large outstores," a stable and a carriage house. Still, Wood's establishment was second-rate compared to the company stores operated by larger merchants such as Basil Cowper and the Telfairs, the Habershams, and Rae, Elbert and Graham, the biggest merchant houses in Savannah by 1775.

In typical eighteenth-century fashion these larger merchant houses engaged in a wide variety of activities. Frequently they hired porters, mariners, blacksmiths, coopers, sailmakers, clerks and carpenters.

Courtesy, Georgia Archives



By 1775 Negroes, free and slave, dominated the ranks of porters, coopers, mariners and blacksmiths in Savannah; but free white labor prevailed in sailmaking, clerking and carpentering. John Wand and Robert Watts, both sailmakers, worked for the Telfairs and the firm of Morel and Mossman. Richard Pryce, a carpenter, made barrel staves for Rae, Elbert and Graham. Joseph Clay, James Habersham's son-in-law, depended upon Negro labor for hoops and staves.

By the late 1760's larger merchants had begun to keep company gardens to grow vegetables to feed ships' crews or else they carted in produce from nearby farms and plantations. Additionally, they stocked a supply of firewood, straw, water and "Greens" for sailors, boatmen and slaves. Cowper and Telfair also operated a small maritime repair and salvage yard in Savannah, providing pitch, tar, turpentine, nails, lines, anchors and sailcloth for ships in need of minor overhauls.

Diversification–A Successful Practice

From 1763 to 1774, over 80 different merchants advertised goods for sale in the *Georgia Gazette*, and by 1775 the larger firms invested money in cargoes, town lots, land, buildings, ships, plantation holdings and slaves. By the time of the Revolution, the formula for success in colonial Georgia demanded mixed operations. Thus, a large planter invested his money not only in land and slaves but also in buildings, ships, cargoes, lumbering operations and town lots; while a merchant owned farms and plantations as well as ships and stores. By today's standards the volume of business was small. Cowper and Telfair, one of Savannah's largest firms, averaged three sales a day during the fall and winter and only one throughout the rest of the year. If a ship's cargo did not return a profit when it was sold in England or in the West Indies, or if the ship was lost at sea, the impact upon such a small volume of business often was disastrous. Because of this most Georgia merchants tried to spread out their base of operations by investing money in several different and independent enterprises.

In 1773, mostly through Savannah, Georgia shipped goods valued at thousands of pounds sterling* to London and other English ports. In the main only three types of commodities went directly to London–rice, indigo and deerskins. Together they accounted for over 80 percent of the shipping between Savannah and London in 1773. The remainder included a variety of items, some tobacco from Georgia, a few articles brought into Savannah from the West Indian trade such as brasiletto and logwood, both woods used in dyeing fabrics, and sago powder, a starchy substance made from palm trees and used in eighteenth-century puddings and prescriptions. Georgia shipped increasing amounts of raw silk to London until about 1770.

Georgia's Hinterland

Opened in 1763, Georgia's second colonial port, Sunbury, had little impact on the colony's economy. Concerned mostly with the West Indian trade and with providing goods and hardware to local planters and Indian traders, Sunbury remained a small town of 40 to 50 houses and less than 200 people. Roger Kelsall and Simon Munro operated the largest merchant house in Sunbury, serving surrounding plantations and stores in Dorchester and Midway. In 1773 less than 50 ships, mostly smaller coasting vessels in the West Indian trade, stopped at Sunbury.

Augusta, 150 miles upriver from Savannah, served as a warehousing center and overland distribution point for the Carolina and Georgia Indian trade. Here perhaps 600 whites, as many slaves, and an odd assortment of Chickasaw, Cherokee and Creek Indians temporarily lived while they sent trains of pack horses along the Upper Creek trail into present-day Alabama and Mississippi, along the Lower Creek route through central Georgia, and along the northward trail to the rich and legendary Keowee country of the Cherokees. Finally joined to the rest of Georgia by the 1763 land cession from the Indians, Augusta thereafter supplied provisions and goods to a growing number of farms, settlements and townships founded as the tide of

*Pounds sterling was the British monetary units used in colonial Georgia. While it is impossible accurately to measure the value of money through time, an eighteenth-century pound sterling might be worth $50 to $70 in American currency today.

emigration swept westward from the Savannah River on the eve of the American Revolution.

Located about 110 miles to the southeast of Augusta on the Savannah River, the German settlement of Ebenezer economically was one of the most important towns in pre-Revolutionary Georgia. Led by their minister, John Martin Bolzius, the industrious Germans raised more than enough for themselves. As early as 1751, they produced enough Indian corn, beans, rice, potatoes, barley and wheat to sell for sizeable profits at Charleston, Savannah and across the river at Purrysburg in South Carolina. Working together, the Salzburgers cleared, plowed, planted and harvested their crops in strips of two to eight acres in size along the red banks of Ebenezer Creek and the Savannah River. By 1774 they had built two saw mills for lumber and one grist mill for grain in addition to a filiature for silk. Farther away from the river at Old Ebenezer, the site of the Germans' first settlement, the Salzburgers tended vineyards and orchards, gathered cattle at cowpens located in former Yuchi Indian lands and in general, prospered in their adopted colony of Georgia. Little did they sense that in the coming Revolution their way of life would be ended forever.

The Importance of the Agrarian Economy

The merchants, traders and artisans who lived in the towns of Ebenezer, Augusta, Sunbury and Savannah accounted for only 15 or 20 percent of the people of the colony in 1773. Just prior to the Revolution, over 80 percent of Georgia's population engaged in agricultural pursuits on plantations and farms. Three main types of agricultural units dominated the colony's economy. Located in the tidewater area and along the sluggish coastal streams inland for a distance of 20 miles, plantations emerged based upon "the queen of the seacoast," rice. From Ebenezer to Augusta along the Georgia bank of the Savannah River, a system of farms intermingled with larger plantations spread westward into the interior. Usually having an outlet into one of the streams emptying into the Savannah or Ogeechee Rivers, these farms were worked by a few slaves or hired hands, managed by a working owner and, to a surprising extent, concerned with markets in Augusta, Ebenezer and Savannah. Lastly, frontier farms dotted the colony's backcountry. Located away from towns and trade centers, worked by families without slaves, helped by hunting, herding and trading between crops, frontier farmers produced mainly what they consumed. Gradually livestock, especially cattle and hogs, came to be the backbone of the small frontier farm.

Each of the colony's three agricultural units—the plantation, farm and small frontier farm—was marked by a different division of land and labor. Along the sea coast Negro slaves outnumbered whites 10 to one. In the eighteenth century there was a widely held view that only Negroes could work in rice fields. Reflecting that theory of labor, James Habersham declared that lands "that are proper for the cultivation of Rice, on which stagnated water is sometimes necessarily kept," caused white inhabitants "to be subject to severe autumnal fevers" which shortened their lives. This land could only be "Advantageously improved," Habersham added, "by people who can purchase a number of Negroes, and many plantations, from their peculiar situation, require a large extent of land for reservoirs to water their fields." In this way, by 1775, Georgia's coastal lands supported a plantation economy largely dependent upon slave labor and producing rice as a staple crop.

After 1756, a group of South Carolinians invested a great deal of money and time in trying to develop indigo as a plantation crop in the lowlands around Frederica. Used as a dye in the eighteenth century, the indigo plant grew well in a hot, humid coastal climate. Some coastal islands also were purchased to grow indigo, but the attempt largely was a failure. In the 20 years prior to the Revolution, Georgia produced a yearly average of 19,000 pounds of indigo, an insignificant sum compared to the millions of pounds coming from South Carolina and, after 1763, from Florida.

A Salzburger house with mud and wattle chimney and a modern porch and roof. Courtesy, Special Collections Department, University of Georgia Library.

Even before 1775, indigo production had declined. Traveling through the area around Frederica just before the Revolution, the botanist William Bartram noted the region's general decay. While there were still a few producing indigo plantations between Darien and St. Simons Island, most owners were satisfied to employ poor families to raise a few cattle, horses, swine and poultry and to protect plantation property. Bartram thought that absentee owners in South Carolina were responsible for the lack of development of indigo.

The region from Ebenezer to Augusta produced the colony's most diversified agriculture. Having favorable soil and climate but without an easily marketable crop such as rice, this area was characterized by farms, small plantations and some cowpen operations. Plantations here tended to be smaller, more self-sufficient and with fewer slaves than coastal rice and indigo plantations. Farms were larger and sometimes not distinguishable from "plantations." For example, a 1772 letter from an anonymous settler described his farm "situated on a small but navigable creek, which falls into the river Savannah, about thirty miles west of Augusta." Large enough to be called a plantation, the owner had "four hundred and forty head of cows, oxen, bulls, and heifers" which he grazed on common land not claimed by anyone. One of his first tasks was to "inclose and plant a large orchard," especially peach trees. Still he mostly "attended to . . . Indian corn, wheat, and provisions" which he supplied to Augusta. Altogether the unnamed farmer produced "36 acres of Indian corn . . . 26 acres of wheat, 12 acres barley, 40 barrels pork, 26 beef, 16 acres of tobacco, . . . and some hides and livestock." In general, he concluded, Georgia's farmers and planters were "very much on the thriving hand, yet few are rich, though I have heard of some large fortunes in Carolina."

The frontier farm generally was owned and managed by a settler and his family. Seldom larger than 150 acres and usually having a hut of one or two rooms as shelter, frontier farms produced mainly corn, vegetables and livestock for the farmer's family. Except as an occasional buyer of hardware, tools, some cloth and powder and lead, the frontier farmer had little to do with the market economies of Savannah, Augusta or Ebenezer. Regardless of his location, the frontier farmer had a precarious economic existence. Along the seacoast such farms were located on the poorer land undesirable for plantation crops. In the interior they occupied the dividing line between civilization and the wilderness, and because of their small size, were especially vulnerable to human and natural disasters. Indian raids, a bad crop, the loss of livestock or the death of a working member of the family frequently caused relocation to a new area. Thus frontier farms were unusually mobile, appearing and disappearing with hardly a trade. Gradually, as more land was acquired and more crops produced for sale, many frontier farms became larger farms or small plantations and merged more into the colony's commercial economy.

One of the original aims of Georgia's founders had been the preparation of potashes, used in making soap, from lumber to take the place of large British imports from Russia. By 1752 potash had been abandoned in favor of the more profitable production of barrel staves, shingles and lumber for shipment to the West Indies. By 1763 the industry had become a winter activity on plantations in the Savannah area. Throughout the colonial period, the emphasis remained on staves and heading for barrels, shingles and construction timber rather than tar, pitch and turpentine as it was in the Carolinas. Lumber production increased rapidly as large numbers of slaves were brought into the colony. Primarily in Savannah merchants kept stocks of shingles and lumber which were used to fill the cargo of a ship when more valuable commodities were not available. By 1772 Georgia exported 3,525,930 shingles, 988,791 staves and 2,163,582 feet of timber. Only a few hundred barrels of pitch, tar and turpentine were exported that year.

The People of Colonial Georgia

Georgia's largest economic resource prior to the

Revolution was its people. In 1773 there were over 18,000 whites and 15,000 blacks in the colony. As James Habersham noted, the back country around Augusta, "where the Lands, from their Fertility and healthy Situation, can be profitably cultivated by and admit of a great Number of White People without the Assistance of Negroes," contained the bulk of the colony's white populace. From 1760 to 1776, thousands of emigrants, chiefly from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas, moved into eastern Georgia between the Savannah and Ogeechee Rivers. The Indian cessions of 1763 and 1773 had made the fertile lands of the great Oconee basin available to the tide of emigrants sweeping south of the Blue Ridge into the Carolinas and Georgia. Thus Georgia became the last remaining southern frontier with good land available before the American Revolution.

In the main, few colonists emigrated to Georgia from England in the decade after the French and Indian War. Only the Queensborough township, known as the "Irish Settlement" because they came from Belfast in northern Ireland, attracted large numbers of colonists from overseas. Because he did not want to offend officials in London, Governor James Wright had no desire to lure emigrants from Scotland, Ireland, England or any place except the British colonies of North America. Basing his program, "for the Better Peopling of this province," upon a highly successful 1735 South Carolina plan, Wright hoped to attract "a middling sort of People" (i.e., a middle class) to Georgia from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas.

But many "Crackers," or lower class settlers, also came. Georgia's second royal governor, Henry Ellis, first complained of the poor quality of upcountry colonists during the war with France. "Many of our Back Settlers," Ellis complained in 1757, "fly for crimes, and from the disturbances of the Northward" colonies. James Wright insisted that ruffians from Augusta continually caused trouble with the Creeks and Cherokees. Certainly they plagued Wright. "There are irregular and bad People amongst us, particularly in the back settlements," he wrote London in 1767, "who will sometimes interrupt, frustrate," and bring to and end all attempts to pacify the Indians. To Wright Augusta was "a kind of frontier" town where there were "a few stores for supplying the Indian Trade, and where numbers of Indians often resort, and in the neighbourhood of a set of vagrants worse than Indians themselves."

James Habersham feared Georgia might become "a Rendezvous for all Horse-Stealers and Criminals . . . from neighbouring Provinces" unless law and order was established in the back settlements around Augusta. Writing to Wright in 1773, Habersham characterized upcountry colonists as "Borderers," ruffians without equal. Wright responded by calling them "crackers," mostly "low-born" Scotch-Irish from the middle colonies. Still, by 1775, Wright found that "great numbers" of settlers, both "crackers" and "a middling sort," had come to Georgia.

Political Upheaval

James Wright justifiably was proud of Georgia's economic picture by 1775. Contented with the progress of the last decade, anticipating the settlement of the new Indian lands acquired in 1773 and hopeful that the next years would bring even more prosperity, Wright and most Georgians confidently faced the future. But it was politics and not economics that governed the troublesome years ahead. As in many of the colonies after 1773, the political climate was not as good as the economic climate.

The issues which first led to protest and then to resistance to England primarily affected Georgia politically and not economically. Although such measures as the Stamp Act of 1765 and the 1767 Townshend duties were economic as well as political in nature, they did not work an undue hardship upon most Georgians. Taken together, these acts had small effect upon Georgia's economy.

Yet in the northern colonies these new measures caused widespread depression and severe financial

Eighteenth century log house with mud and wattle chimney, modern addition, and modern roof. Courtesy, Special Collections Department, University of Georgia Library.

losses. In Georgia they had little significance. The colony's small class of wealthy planters and merchants, probably no more than 50 families in all, primarily were affected by British duties on foreign luxury articles. Only the Sugar Act of 1764 posed any immediate threat to Georgia's economy. Passed by the British Parliament on April 5, the Sugar Act was designed to raise part of the annual cost of the colonial military establishment. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister of England, George Grenville, meant to enforce the act by sending naval vessels especially assigned to Charleston and St. Augustine.

To protest the Sugar Act, the Massachusetts House of Representatives sent a circular letter to the rest of the colonies asking them to express their disapproval of the new law. The Georgia Assembly ignored the political argument of "no taxation without representation" in the Massachusetts letter and instead based its protest upon economic grounds. To Georgia's representatives the new regulations would end the colony's profitable lumber trade with the West Indies. Georgia's lumber was mainly exported in vessels that stopped at Savannah enroute to the West Indies. As the exporters did not control these vessels, they could not give the required bonds that the lumber would be sold only in British islands. The Assembly directed its colonial agent in London to protest the Sugar Act.

At first glance the Stamp Act, which became law on March 22, 1765, looked harmless. It required

every pamphlet, newspaper, ship's clearance papers, lease, license, insurance policy, bill of sale, bond and all legal documents to be written or printed on stamped paper sold by public officials. The money raised from the sale of stamps was to be used to defend the colonies. The Stamp Act was scheduled to go into effect on November 1, 1765.

By November 1 there was no stamp officer or stamped paper in Georgia. In Savannah harbor over 20 ships, loaded primarily with rice, waited for clearance papers from the customs house. The Council advised Governor Wright to let the vessels leave with a certificate stating that no stamps were available, and he did so until the stamps arrived in December. This delay in exporting rice at the height of the tradings season had an adverse effect upon the price brought by Georgia rice.

The Stamp Act disrupted trade in Georgia. Still, when the stamp agent arrived in January 1776, stamps were distributed and about 60 vessels left with stamped papers. In this way Georgia became the only colony to issue stamps and later rebel. The Stamp Act changed the controversy between Georgia and England from considerations of profit and loss to those of political principles. It gave the province a common ground to unite with other colonies, particularly South Carolina, in protest. Governor Wright later admitted that Georgia was never the same after the Stamp Act.

The basic policies of the British commercial system did not conflict seriously with Georgia's economic interests on the eve of the Revolution. Yet while the events of 1763 to 1775 did not affect most Georgians' pocketbooks, their heartstrings were plucked. The threat of economic interference caused uneasiness. The plight of the northern colonies, especially Massachusetts, did not go unnoticed in Georgia. A great many planters, merchants and small farmers believed the same thing could happen here. Most of Georgia's people lived in the back country, a poor, pioneer population easily alarmed by any attempt at increased taxation. Although quit rents, or royal taxes on land, had never been collected in Georgia, the thought of their collection after 1765 served as a constant source of irritation to Georgia's settlers.

It seemed appropriate that the first fighting of the American Revolution in Georgia centered around the colony's chief export crop, rice. In January 1776, British ships and transports suddenly appeared off Tybee Island near Savannah. Desperately in need of provisions and supplies for their beseiged troops in Boston, the British looked to Georgia, the southernmost colony not in rebellion and rich in provisions, for relief. Opposite the town of Savannah lay 26 merchantmen laden with rice, forbidden to leave by an order from the Continental Congress prohibiting the exportation of rice from the "united colonies" until March 1, 1776. Many of the Georgians who either owned or shipped in these vessels were not in sympathy with the Whig cause and awaited the first opportunity to put out to sea. Realizing this, the Whig's Council of Safety in Savannah ordered "the rudders be unshipped . . . and that the rigging and sails be taken away and secured from the several vessels now lying in the port of Savannah." Colonel Lachlan McIntosh was detailed to enforce the order.

Freedom morning for Georgians came on March 2, 1776. Just before dawn, about four o'clock, the sailors guarding the rice boats were surprised by the tramp of feet, the rattling of weapons and equipment, the sound of voices barking orders, and out of the dark and morning mist came the redcoats, 200 to 300 of them, under the command of Majors James Grant and John Maitland. Two crewmen escaped to sound the alarm; and, for Georgia, the Revolution was on.

Rebellion and a Declining Economy

Great Britain responded to the "Battle of the Rice Boats" by prohibiting Georgia from trading with any part of the world except the British Isles, the British West Indies and parts of other colonies

controlled by British armies. To enforce the blockade, British warships patrolled off Tybee Island. The results were dramatic. In all of 1775, Georgia shipped products valued at £103,477 to England. The export figure for 1776 was only £12,570. In 1777 and 1778 nothing was shipped to England. Only the fall of Savannah to the British in 1778 reopened trade with England. Still, the value of exports to England in 1780, 1781 and 1782 when Savannah was occupied by the British never reached prewar levels. In 1782 only £6,804 of exports, or approximately five percent of the 1775 total, made its way to England. After the Revolution began, regardless of who controlled the port of Savannah, Georgia's direct trade with England was insignificant.

British naval vessels on the coast in 1776 sometimes interfered with Georgia's trade but did not entirely stop it. Merchants in Savannah managed to send out vessels to trade with the Dutch and French West Indies. Joseph Clay, who controlled James Habersham's interests in Savannah after Habersham's death in 1775, occasionally traded with Cape Francois, the main port of the French-held island of Saint Domingue (Santo Domingo), and in two instances, ships from Bermuda and France put into Savannah with "very valuable cargoes." For some months in 1776 and 1777 the Whig government in Savannah planned to trade directly with France. Peter Emmanuel De la Plaigne was appointed trade agent to the French Farmers General, but nothing ever came of the scheme.

Yet while the policies of the Second Continental Congress effectively shut down Georgia's direct trade with Great Britain, Florida experienced a large increase in the volume of exports to the mother country. Some Georgians, especially in the area south of the Altamaha, shifted the market for their crops and produce from Savannah to St. Augustine, preferring the established trade practices and stable currency of Great Britain. From 1777 to 1782, St. Augustine replaced Savannah as Georgia's link to England's markets, and considerable quantities of rice from Georgia made its way to Great Britain this way.

In Savannah the Council of Safety early began buying up large volumes of rice stored in warehouses. Faced with a scarcity of hard money, the impossibility of drawing bills of exchange on English merchants and a lack of established credit, the Council of Safety and its political successors hoped to ship rice as payment for military supplies, salt and other "needful articles." John Wereat was appointed commissioner of public trade and an insurance office was set up to insure cargoes of Georgia shippers. Soon representatives from Congress arrived in Georgia to buy up agricultural products and ship them northward as a means of paying for supplies for the war. Robert Morris, head of a secret Congressional committee which purchased and exported produce, sent agents to Savannah and Augusta where they contracted with "many gentlemen from . . . Georgia" to furnish supplies.

The Currency Failure and Continuing Decline

By the summer of 1778, this governmental trade had broken down. Back country farmers found that Continental currency was worthless and they increasingly were reluctant to sell their products to Congressional agents. Several vessels were captured or run aground trying to escape British vessels between Charleston and Savannah, and insurance rates jumped 40 percent. British naval activity was irregular and ineffective at times, but it kept many trade goods from Savannah's merchants and stores. Foreign goods became so scarce—"the necessities of life," Joseph Clay called them—that dry goods and hardware at Ebenezer sold for many times their prewar purchase price. Depending upon imported English goods for its maintenance, the Indian trade through Augusta and Savannah was suspended because of a lack of supplies. By early 1777 farmers in the back country experienced shortages in agricultural necessities such as axes, harnesses, horse collars, trace chains, whips, nails, sickles and files.

By September 1778, there was little foreign trade from Savannah, and public confidence in the new government began to drop as stocks of goods dwindled.

As a source of foreign goods, a considerable internal trade with Charleston was maintained in the early years of the war. From Augusta to Savannah a vast array of rafts, barges and pole boats moved goods from Georgia's interior to Ebenezer or Savannah where they were shipped overland to Charleston. Ebenezer became a focal point of this inland trade, and in the spring and fall of 1777 and 1778, hundreds of wagons gathered at the German settlements along the Savannah River to carry supplies to Charleston and to bring foreign goods back to Georgia in return. With the fall of Savannah to the British in December 1778, and the occupation of Ebenezer soon thereafter, this overland trade to the Carolinas ended.

Rice in shock. Courtesy, Special Collections Department, University of Georgia Library.

At the beginning of the Revolution in Georgia, there was an abundance of food within the colony. Throughout its short colonial history Georgia had been dependent upon the middle and southern colonies, particularly Pennsylvania and the Carolinas, for a portion of its grain supply, but by 1775 the province had a surplus of other provisions and crops above consumption requirements. Corn, peas, livestock, salt meat and rice regularly were exported from the colony, and in 1774, 63 barrels of rice were sent to Boston to relieve the suffering caused by the closing of Boston harbor. Except for rice the proportion of prewar exports to domestic production in Georgia had been small, and the surplus quickly was eliminated by wartime needs. By 1776 the Continental Congress had placed an embargo on certain food products, especially salt beef and pork, and in 1778 a sweeping embargo on all grain and provisions was enacted which lasted throughout the war.

Both 1776 and 1778 were disastrous crop years for the southern states, especially Georgia. So little flour from Pennsylvania and Maryland made its way to Georgia that a sweet bread fashioned from corn, always popular in colonial times, became a favored substitute. A shortage of implements, seed and labor made 1778 a far from bountiful year in the state, and a late winter in 1779 threatened growing crops as far south as Midway. Corn became the state's indispensable crop during the Revolution, and in the summer of 1776, Congressional representatives were authorized to impress corn and to purchase rice from Georgia.

Although cattle were plentiful in Georgia in 1774 and 1775, demands by British and American armies, by the French fleet which landed at Savannah under Count d'Estaing in 1779 and the seizure and destruction of cattle by raiding bands of Whigs and Tories severely taxed the available supply. The region between the Altamaha and St. Johns Rivers changed hands often as the fighting swirled southward, and many plantations, cowpens and farms were destroyed. Congressional officials in the area frequently reported shortages and difficulties in obtaining needed food supplies. At the siege of Savannah, both sides had trouble obtaining beef and pork, and

the French fleet sailed away with livestock taken from nearby plantations.

A great scarcity of salt, especially in 1777 and 1778, seriously limited the supply of beef and pork. Time and again Congressional representatives found a plentiful supply of livestock to slaughter only a precious few because of a lack of salt. Before the war Georgia imported almost all its supply and the new government was unprepared to provide this critical requirement. In early 1777 the State prohibited the exportation of salt, and only a few bushels came infrequently into Georgia from Virginia and the French West Indies. So valuable was the commodity that it sometimes was used to pay soldiers for their service. Salt continued to be scarce throughout the war.

Part of the problem in obtaining supplies for state and Continental forces lay in the money used for payment. By the summer of 1776 the newly formed state government issued paper currency to pay its troops and to serve as a medium of exchange. In less than a year the state money had begun to depreciate. In May 1778, a Savannah merchant accused the State of printing so much paper currency that its "value had been reduced to nothing." By the time the British occupied Savannah, Georgia currency had depreciated far below the value of money issued by the Continental Congress. Never accepted outside Georgia, this money became almost worthless within the state as well.

The Revolution brought to a close two decades of prosperity for Georgia's rice and indigo planters. The Continental embargo on exports of provisions included rice, and Congress recommended its strict observation in Georgia. The 1775 crop, largest in the colony's history, only partially was marketed, and warehouses in Savannah were filled to capacity when fighting broke out in March 1776. Some eventually found its way to England, to the French West Indies and to the north for the consumption of the Continental army.

The War for Georgia

As the new rebel government took over in Savannah in 1776 and began to extend its control over the rest of Georgia, plantation owners in the Ogeechee and Midway districts still loyal to the King of England, prepared to leave. Gathering up their families and slaves, these Loyalists abandoned their plantations and moved south toward Florida. At first the state tried to operate the abandoned plantations, but the effort largely proved unsuccessful. After the British re-established control in 1779, many Loyalists returned to their homes; but the harassments and disruptions of constant partisan warfare ruined the planting cycle of rice and indigo. Then, too, separation from England meant the loss of the bounty which in large part encouraged the production of indigo. Although quantities of both commodities were exported from British-held Savannah in 1780 and 1781, production never reached prewar levels. Nevertheless, rice remained an important staple. As the British began to prepare for the evacuation of Savannah in 1782, many merchants urged General Alexander Leslie to postpone the withdrawal until the late fall so that the low country crops, including 10,000 barrels of rice, could be gathered.

The capture of Savannah by the British was followed by the penetration of Tory and Royal forces to every part of the State except the northernmost and westernmost settlements. A constant bushwacking warfare began and bands of Whigs and Tories carried off slaves, confiscated property, destroyed crops and burned farms and settlements. The intensity of the fighting in 1780 and 1781 caused many people to leave Georgia, especially in the upcountry region around Augusta. Hundreds of Georgians fled to safer areas in South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia. After the British evacuation of Savannah in July 1782, many refugees began returning to their homes. By the end of 1783 there were more people living in the upcountry than ever before.

The low country from Savannah to the St. Marys

River was not as fortunate. In the winter and spring of 1779, a great many Loyalists returned to their abandoned plantations as the British captured Savannah. They were joined by Tory refugees from the Carolinas and Virginia, and by 1780 a plantation economy in the tidewater region had been partially restored. The fall of West Florida to the Spanish in 1780-1781 brought still more Tory settlers to Georgia, and by 1781 the growing number of refugees strained the fragile economy of the area. Coastal raids, forays by irregular bands and the threat of attacks from the Spanish and French further disrupted trade and commerce. Many wealthy families were ruined and plantations reduced to a sad state.

Aftermath of the War

The close of the war brought Georgia's greatest economic loss. As the British left Savannah they took hundreds of slaves and thousands of pounds sterling of goods with them. Altogether, Georgia lost perhaps 6,000 slaves who were carried off to Florida or the West Indies. Just before the British evacuated Savannah, the Georgia legislature tried to relieve the loss by appointing agents to negotiate with persons in the British lines for the purchase of slaves about to be carried away. Few were bargained for. So great was the scarcity of slaves in 1783 that ordinary Negroes sold for 70 to 100 guineas, four times their prewar price.

Georgia also suffered through the flight of large numbers of Tories who were men of property and skills. So many plantations had been abandoned that the state found it necessary to appoint managers and overseers to prevent systematic pillage. In Savannah many of the resident merchants were Loyalists. When they left, a great deal of the indebtednesses owed by individuals was wiped out. At the beginning of the Revolution, the new state legislature wanted to take action against the person and property of specified classes of Loyalists, but little was done until 1782 when a confiscation and banishment act was passed. Throughout the war, the constant confiscation, restoration and forfeiture of property created confusion as the tide of war shifted back and forth. Frequently the *Georgia Gazette* carried advertisements for owners of estates and property who could not be found. In the back settlements handbills listed abandoned farms and plantations. The greatest exodus of whites and slaves came in the coastal rice plantation area.

The close of the American Revolution in 1783 left Georgia with disorganized property relationships, a scarcity of capital and confused finances. The state's chief resources, its inhabitants and their skills, also suffered because of the exodus of Tories and slaves. Bad crop seasons in 1785 and 1786 further added to the state's economic plight. With the rest of the new nation, Georgia endured the panic of 1786, but within a decade there was steady improvement and a rapid repair of the damage and loss of the war years. Gradually financial stability, increased trade, new settlers and a confidence that came with being a new nation all contributed toward the adoption of a new Constitution in 1788.

The American Revolution marked the end of an age in Georgia's economic life. The colonial period had been characterized by established trade relationships with the mother country, by bounties and by an almost medieval system of acquiring and owning land. In theory it was the king who owned land and to whom rents were due. Under this system rice and indigo flourished, mercantile interests in London dominated Georgia's commerce and an extensive plantation economy developed in the coastal low country. Special commodities such as hides, indigo and raw silk were favored by Britain's commercial system, lumbering increased, and Georgia prospered in the decade prior to the war.

The New Order

The Revolution changed much of this. With the establishment of a new government there came fresh ideas about land acquisition and ownership. Now it was to be given to soldiers as bounties or to

settlers with few, if any, rents or fees attached. As early as 1776, land had been given to Whigs as a bounty for army enlistments or for service in the war. Throughout the Revolution, Georgia had used pledges of land to recruit state and Continental soldiers and to bring new citizens to Georgia. Now that the fighting had ended, the state made good its promise. Plots of 250 acres exempt from taxes for 10 years were to be given to Georgians who remained in the state and served in the militia during the British occupation. Those who left but had served in Whig forces elsewhere were given the same amount of land.

The promise of land bounties and the richness of the backcountry caused a large migration of settlers into Georgia when the fighting stopped in the summer of 1782. One application for bounties came from Connecticut troops who remembered the fertility of the state's piedmont when they served in Georgia during the war. Old settlers returned. By April 1783, even before the British left Savannah, over 500 families reportedly had settled in the backcountry in the preceding six months. To those settlers the end of the Revolution meant the beginning of a new life, and land was the key to their hope for the future.

Rice fields, showing canals. Courtesy, Special Collections Department, University of Georgia Library.

Because so many Tories left Georgia, there now were more opportunities for advancement and improvement, and the new society was more equal and mobile. Economically, one class of Georgians (besides the Tories) benefitted little from the Revolution. At the bottom of the economic scale before the war, Negro slaves still occupied the bottom rung after 1783.

After the Revolution, rice and indigo never again dominated the state's economy to the extent of 1773. The coastal low country became less important economically and politically as the center of Georgia's agrarian empire moved into the rich piedmont. Ebenezer and Sunbury, two emerging centers of Georgia's economy before the Revolution, disappeared with hardly a trace. In the upcountry, Augusta never again dominated the Indian trade as it had before 1776 but became important as a farm trading center. After the Revolution, Georgia's economy hardly had time to adjust to all these changes before a more radical transformation took place. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin near Savannah in 1793 marked still another revolutionary change in the state's economic life.

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Teacher's Guide

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Teachers
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Focus

The focus of this guide is the economic situation in Georgia prior to and during the American Revolution. Major emphasis is placed on the following points.

1. Georgia's early economic activity was concentrated along the coast.
2. Georgia's early economy was based on shipping and products produced by coastal farms and plantations.
3. Georgia's economic wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few individuals located in Savannah.
4. Georgia's economic progress was dependent upon British needs.
5. Until 1776 Georgia's economy, in contrast to other colonies, experienced very few setbacks.

Skill Objectives for the Student

- Develop and interpret a graph.
- Construct a diagram of a social system.
- Practice library skills.
- Gather and interpret data.
- Present gathered data in an art form.

Learning Objectives

- Identify early influential Georgians.
- Develop an hypothesis about the close economic relationship between the Georgia colony and Great Britain.
- Recognize the major economic activities of the Georgia colony.
- Speculate about the impact of migration into Georgia on the colony's economy.
- Understand the reaction in the Georgia colony to British regulatory legislation.
- Recognize the impact of military action, disastrous crop years and shortages of staples on the Georgia economy.
- Identify the economic changes which were a result of the Revolutionary War.

Suggested Vocabulary

Naval stores

Circular letter

Quit Rents

Pillage

Confiscation

Primogeniture

Entail

Agrarian

Suggested Schedule

This unit will take about two weeks depending on the number of activities used. A tentative outline of Georgia's early commercial developments follows.

I. Founding and development of Savannah

II. The migration inland from Savannah

III. The events which influenced the economy of Colonial and Revolutionary Georgia

Activities

These activities are numbered to correspond to the suggested schedule.

I. Founding and development of Savannah

A. Distribute an outline map of the city of Savannah (circa 1770). Assign students the task of identifying the major commercial activities. The students should use a color key for each of the major businesses. Example: James Habersham's establishment on the river front should be located and colored red.

B. **What's My Line**: Students should go to the library to research individuals in the Georgia colony such as Joseph Clay, Edward Telfair, James Habersham, Governor James Wright, James Martin Bolzuis, William Bartram, Henry Ellis, etc. Some students should be assigned secretly a specific role to research. Other members of the class will be told that they will ask questions of these students to determine their identity. (Similar to the game show,

"What's My Line.") All students should be allowed to research colonial Georgians who had a role in the economic growth of the colony.

II. The migration inland from Savannah

A. After the students have completed readings on the social groups in the Georgia colony, ask them to construct a diagram of the social organization. Divide the students into small groups and allow five to 10 minutes for comparisons and discussion of their diagrams. Then ask the students to defend their selections before the whole class.

B. Imagine you are a Georgian in one of the three agricultural units. Write a diary which depicts your life as a colonial Georgian for a period of one week. Have students exchange their diaries with others. Each student should read the diary and analyze it for historical accuracy, reality and interest. Selected diaries could be shared with the whole class.

III. The events which influenced the economy of Colonial and Revolutionary Georgia

A. **Roving Reporter**: This activity centers around the first fighting of the American Revolution in Georgia "The Battle of the Rice Boats." Divide the class into groups of six. One member of the group should be assigned the role of reporter, the others the roles of a British sailor, Joseph Clay, Major Grant, Colonel McIntosh, a small farmer. The students should be allowed time to research their roles so that they can answer questions on their reaction to the British blockade of Savannah. The reporter should make up questions which will draw out economic, political and social reasons for the role player's reactions to the "Battle of the Rice Boats." As a summation each member of the group should write out a one-page report on the economic impact of the blockade on colonial Georgia.

B. **Mural**: Georgia is building a World Trade Center. You have been commissioned to do a mural on the economic growth of colonial Georgia to hang in the lobby of the Trade Center. You should show the variety and importance of colonial products and the contributing groups.

C. Develop an economic timeline using the major Georgia products. Some material is included in the readings and the students should gather additional information. This timeline should be constructed on poster board and displayed where the class can discuss the economic growth. The following diagram is a suggested form.

	1775	1776	1777	1778	1779	1780	1781	1782	1783
Amts. in (100's) Bushels, Barrels, Etc.									

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The following is a suggested color key.

Rice–red
Indigo–blue
Silk–yellow
Naval Stores–green

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Define an economic indicator. Identify several economic indicators in colonial Georgia. What do these indicators suggest about the economy of Georgia in 1776? in 1780?

2. What might be some arguments for and against a diversified economic base? How might a colonial Georgian have argued on this point?

3. Explain why the major products of colonial Georgia were rice, indigo, silk and naval stores.

4. Identify the three main types of agricultural units in the colonial economy. Which of these contributed most to the colony's growth? Why?

5. Speculate upon the role of the slave in each of the three agricultural units. If you were a slave, in which of the units would you have preferred to live?

6. Explain why you would agree or disagree with the author's statement, "Georgia's largest economic resource prior to the Revolution was its people."

7. Why did Governor Wright attempt to attract as settlers "a middling sort of people?" How would you define "a middling sort of people?" How successful was Wright in these efforts?

8. Which of the following acts, the Sugar Act or the Stamp Act, had the greatest influence on Georgia's economy? Support your answer with data from the reading.

9. What would have been your opinion of the "Battle of the Rice Boats" if you had been the captain of a ship preparing to sail with a cargo of rice? What would have been your opinion had you been a member of the Whig's Council of Safety in Savannah?

10. What types of scarcities developed in Georgia during the Revolution? Identify the causes for these scarcities. When flour became scarce in Georgia, a type of sweet bread made from corn became a substitute. Speculate on other substitutes which might have been used.

11. Defend or refute this statement, "Georgia was better off without the Tories and their ideas about being loyal to England."

12. Name two changes brought about by the Revolutionary War which affected Georgia's economy. Determine whether these changes were beneficial or detrimental to Georgia's economy.

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